The Kalamazoo Freshman Orientation in September 1975 was one of the most complex Outward Bound-type courses, both programmatically and logistically, with which I have been associated. The problems of coordinating three modules of 20 students each for seven day periods between land and sea, the subsequent difference in experience between the different modules, and the difficulty of transition between the two environments created a good many problems that need to be reassessed carefully before such a course is repeated. I would like to share my perceptions and evaluation of the different components of the experience in the following order: site selection, course design, dynamics of course, organization and preparation, staffing, staff training and orientation, logistics, general evaluation, and recommendations.

Site Selection. This presented some of the major problems of the course. The area selected—Painted Rocks National Lakeshore—is potentially an excellent site but is limited because of numerous access roads, the difficulty in providing variety to the backpacking, limited high risk potential, and the fact that bear hunting season occurred during a major portion of the course and constituted a constant hazard to the safety of students. On the one hand, the accessibility of the area is an asset. At no point were students more than several hours away from help and, in a course like this where the group leaders are essentially inexperienced, this is important. This fact also made it possible for the Course Director and Outward Bound Consultant to move around fairly freely from group to group. The chief limitation was that it was mostly easy for the groups to find their way (along the shoreline) with a minimum of navigation ability and to cop out when the going got tough. It was hard to mount any serious expedition of more than two days in length and, consequently, students seldom had the opportunity to experience being on a serious expedition nor were they really pushed to cover a large distance or have the opportunity to choose different modes or times of travel. In a sense, it was largely a move from one established camping area or one civilized place to another. In addition, there were large portions of the country that were extremely difficult to travel through because of large areas of swamp and extremely dense undergrowth (which could be utilized in a different style course). This almost necessitated movement by trail systems or logging roads, which presented some challenge on their own because they were not all recorded on maps and led in all directions.
On a positive side, the sand dunes offered an exciting though limited program opportunity in terms of the contrast with the rest of the land experience and from an environmental studies standpoint. Equally, the shoreline of Lake Superior was a sharp contrast to the dense forest inland and a suitable reward when the students arrived on its beaches or traveled along its shores. It also introduced one of the serious safety factors in terms of the frequent storms and high winds which occurred frequently during the course and made hypothermia a potential factor. Having a section of the beach to explore and a site by the lake for solo was one of the more peaceful and satisfying parts of the experience. Unfortunately, the site had limited potential for any kind of high risk activity or serious challenge, and there was a boredom to the travel that discouraged many staff and students. After a good deal of searching, a few rappel and zip wire sites were worked out that provided some excitement, but these were generally difficult to program and offered students a taste of an activity which there was no other opportunity to explore. There was absolutely no rock that was sound enough for rock climbing and no streams or gorges that offered a natural challenge in crossing at this time of year.

Course Design. This was probably the most controversial element of the course. Dividing the course between three modules of students whose experience followed a different structure made it difficult to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the course or assess the value of the different components. Students and staff had the sense of being shuttled around and of barely being able to get into either land or sea before having to switch. The course lacked continuity as a result. This was less so for the groups that spent the first two weeks on land and the last week on the ship than the other two arrangements. These groups were more able to get into the land experience, be aware of its rewards and limitations, and see the sea phase as being a natural kind of culmination. The other groups' experience seemed either interrupted or anticlimactic. I think it was particularly difficult for the group that was on the boat during the first week to adjust to being on land and not be anxious to cut short their experience toward the very end. This seemed partly a factor of coming closer to civilization (route selection) and the end of the course (little structure) and partly a result of boredom with just trudging through the woods. Other experiences and more interesting or challenging activities would have added much to the conclusion of the land experience for all groups.

The limited amount of time spent on land during each seven day module made it difficult for all but the one group to get into the feel of really living on the land. Seven days is a very short time to acquire and get to test wilderness backpacking skills. Because of programming and logistics problems, it was difficult for groups to explore inland very much and
hardly any use was made of the spectacular Kingston Plains. The time required to cover the distances involved left little time for appreciation of the environment, or for use of activities like orienteering or field study.

The sea portion of the experience was the most difficult to assess. Obviously it had an impact, positive or negative, on all those who took part. The differences in style among the leadership, the demands of running a boat 24 hours a day, and the disposition of some persons toward or away from a sailing experience (seasick or otherwise), produced the most extreme reactions of any element of the course. From this standpoint, the sea experience comes across as the single most effective aspect of the program. Of particular value, I think, was the contrast between the pace of activity and the sense of freedom and movement on the boat as opposed to on land. It was particularly interesting to observe how those students who were on the boat during the first week adjusted to the different kind of space they experienced when on land and how they approached the problems of moving on land after the discipline of the boat. Perhaps the main question to be considered in terms of the boat is the cost and the fact that the experience of moving from land to sea, not to mention the logistics and shuttling by vehicle, created a good deal of hassle and limited program time in both environments. However, even this experience had its value as a learning activity, particularly for those who weren't passive and looked forward to the change as a challenge. For others, I fear, it was largely an interruption and an occasion to relate back to a civilized world, buy candy and drink beer.

Dynamics of Course. This reflects as much my own personal orientation than a particularly strongly stated or agreed upon premise of the course. However, in this kind of a situation, particularly with students making the critical step from home to college, there is considerable opportunity for observation and counseling of students around personal goals, behavior, and interaction with their peers and others. Some of this occurs as a matter of course, and some was structured in the form of academic planning for the coming year, though this was hard to fit in among the activities of the course. Much more opportunity for counseling seemed to occur, as is my experience, on an informal basis when the pressures of the course led individual students (and staff) to demonstrate and have to confront behavior that came into conflict with others, the goals of the course, and led to a less satisfying or even frustrating experience for themselves. This occurred, for example, when stronger individuals felt held back by those who were slower or less skilled. Some of these situations were dealt with directly by the patrol leaders while in other instances the Course Director and Consultant served to facilitate or resolve certain issues.
Some leaders were very much attuned to this aspect of the experience while others were very detached, uncomfortable, or resistant to this part of their role.

Some of the problems that arose during the course were clearly of a pathological nature and could potentially be disruptive or even dangerous in this kind of a situation, particularly when leaders are less confident or inexperienced in dealing with them. A prerequisite for leadership training on such experiences needs to be some understanding (and experience of) group process, some background in the dynamics of personal behavior, and some sense of how this relates to the experience students are having. In addition, those leaders who were most effective in interacting with their groups, stimulating student problem solving and decision making, and in resolving conflicts and dissatisfaction with the experience were those with some training or exposure to communications skills. This is important enough that a good portion of any training or orientation needs to be devoted to this concern—to examining the potential dynamics of the course, anticipating possible individual and group problems, and training staff in basic communications in a way that is personally meaningful and applicable to situations which may arise. I would recommend using outside resource persons to accomplish this.

Another aspect of the course that drew considerable and expected reaction from students and some staff was the debriefing process. This is essential, in my opinion, at both the instructor and Course Director level. Leaders need to be tuned into how students are receiving an experience and responding to their leadership or lack thereof. There are also many opportunities at this level to identify and deal effectively with student conflicts or dissatisfactions. Time needs to be taken frequently during the course—formally and informally—to accomplish this. Equally, senior leaders and course directors need to be tuned into this process, both to stay in tune with the mood and success of the experience and to resolve any problem situations that have not been resolved at the patrol level. Formal debriefings for this purpose are natural and should be planned for at the conclusion of each separate module of a course. This encourages termination of that phase of the experience and opens the way for assimilation of new experience, as in the transition from land to sea and vice versa. This is also important at other times, such as after a crisis or when some change in the status of the group occurs. When such opportunities are lost, some of the learning and growth potential of the course is lost. More specifically, some of the opportunity which this kind of experience offers for students to become aware of and potentially change less functional behaviors is less available. This is clearly a process that is in motion informally at all times and which it is extremely beneficial to pick up on.
It is also part of the experiential learning process that students be given as much responsibility for problem solving and decision making as is consistent with safety and the logistical requirements of the course. In order to do so, a certain amount of flexibility needs to be incorporated into the course design and support by the leadership provided for students to experiment and even flounder a bit with their own internal process, individually and as a group. A certain amount of patience and "tolerance for ambiguity" is essential to accomplish this. This is harder for inexperienced leaders to provide and necessitates a support structure to encourage. Hence, there needs to be considerable interaction among group leaders and frequent debriefing of instructors to maintain support, prevent isolation, and head off potential problems. This is a function of the course leadership (director and senior instructors) and is difficult with a course as complicated as Michigan by Land and Sea. These are concerns to which the Course Director and Consultant give much attention but were unable to accomplish equally with all groups of students or staff. At the very least, it is important to explore expectations of students and staff alike at the beginning of the course and to monitor these throughout as much as possible. It is equally important to review these expectations and to resolve any differences in what happened at the conclusion of the program. I even believe there would be a value in exploring a contract model of learning (and functioning) for staff and students that could be evaluated at the conclusion of the experience.

Organization and Preparation. This was accomplished with a good deal of effective effort and commitment on the part of both student and faculty staff and I consider this one of the most important gains in putting an experience of this nature together. It provided an opportunity for students and faculty to work together that is fairly unique within an academic community. The amount of effort put into gathering information, exploring possible program sites, arranging for training, acquiring equipment, doing reconnaissance, and planning food was carried out with an efficiency that was remarkable for an organization for whom this is not a professional concern. The energy of students, particularly those who were not getting paid, for this kind of effort was exceptional, and the dedication of the staff charged with coordination and management both professional and complete. There were problems caused by a change in course directors and other job commitments but, on the whole, I believe this element of the course was carried out extremely well. A great many dedicated people contributed in this way to the overall success of the course. There were a few lapses, such as at the conclusion of the course when students returned to Kalamazoo, but these were minor by comparison and not unexpected when faculty had been away from home for nearly a month and students are anxious to get on with the business of going to school. More attention, however, needs to be given to structuring the conclusion of the course and return to campus.
there was a good deal of frustration and anger expressed by staff and, as expected, focused on the Course Director and the Consultant to whom the instructors had looked for more guidance and support than it turned out to be possible to provide equally and fairly. Hence, a good many negative feelings were expressed at the conclusion of the course that were reasonable from the instructors' standpoint but were not unexpected given the complications of program and logistical scheduling. There was also some differences of opinion expressed over the planning of the course and this continues to be a factor in planning for the coming year. Hopefully, this can be worked out to the benefit of all involved and the program.

Staff Training and Orientation. This was handled inadequately on a number of levels. Each of the instructors should have had some familiarity with the program site, whether land or sea, and there seemed no way in which this could have been accomplished given student summer work schedules and the time available for planning. With inexperienced staff, this is a necessity. As mentioned in staffing, training for most leaders was limited and this was obvious in turn in the limited training and direction given students, the common misunderstandings among students about the purposes of the course, and the general casualness about achieving certain goals, having an adequate camp, or seeing the experience through when the end came into sight. Fortunately, the environment was benign enough that this was not a serious problem. As far as a general orientation to the course and to running a program of this nature, there was very limited time in which to accomplish this and inadequate commitment on the part of faculty leaders and the Course Director to bringing this off in a way that would have been most effective. There seemed to be too many other responsibilities and commitments during the on-campus orientation for faculty to give their undivided time. This suggests an orientation away from the demands of the college and, to properly prepare for such a program, at least five days needs to be given to pre-course staff planning and preparation. If this is to include becoming familiar with the program site, then seven to ten days is essential. This is a time both for teambuilding, training, clarifying the goals and procedures for the course, and defining jobs and expectations. There are good models available for this through programs like Outward Bound. Clearly a detailed plan needs to be developed to achieve these ends and effective means identified to carry them out.

Logistics. This is a difficult problem on any course of this size, particularly with inexperienced staff and no structure identified and developed to do this efficiently. These concerns include food, equipment, travel, and general support for staff in the field. A great deal of planning time did go into this part of the program, more so than in the actual program planning,
and it was handled fairly efficiently. The food planning and buying was apparently done with a good deal of care and much credit is due for the way in which instructors and students worked together to sort and package the food for the course. On the whole, the food was tasty and nourishing as well as providing an opportunity for creativity and initiative in the preparation. The equipment, both purchased and rented, was of high quality and fulfilled the needs of the course. Students were provided with adequate personal equipment lists and generally brought what was needed. Transportation was a considerable problem and expense, particularly with the long shuttles between land and sea. This created problems in coordinating certain aspects of the land program since there were times when there were no vehicles available for the land portion of the program. Two vehicles in the field for 60 students is simply inadequate and caused some of the breakdown in communications and supply systems. This would have been less of a problem if the students carried more food or if there were fewer contact points with groups in the field. However, this also has limitations when a program is new and staff inexperienced in that ongoing contact would be more difficult and evacuation more complicated.

In addition, it was difficult for the logistics person, who did an exceptionally fine job, to take care of everything that needed to be done and not be run ragged. This particular person wanted to feel part of the program and was often lonely and isolated. I think it is important on a mobile course to have a comfortable base for staff to return to, for sick students to recuperate, and to serve as a point of coordination and communication. The garage that was used was inadequate for this purpose and hardly hospitable. It was also inconveniently located for some aspects of the course and required considerable travel on some resupplies.

General Evaluation. Surprisingly, despite all the problems and complications, I believe this was largely an effectively run and successful course. Most students had a positive experience in relating to their new peers, learning about the outdoors, having new and challenging experiences, and getting well started in making the transition to the college experience. The sea experience obviously had a profound effect on most everyone and there is a lot of positive response to having the opportunity to explore a part of Michigan unknown to most. The high risk experiences of the course—rappelling and zip wires—were important experiences for most who did them for the first time and are an essential part of a course of this nature when they can be programmed. The environmental study aspects of the course were of interest to most and many students seemed to develop an awareness they had not had previously as well as an appreciation for the outdoors and their own capacities. In short, it appears to me that the course achieved most of the objectives that it set out to meet.
The problems that occurred were no more nor less than are inherent in running any program of this size with an organization that is not specifically set up to do so. There is much that can be learned by experience and I am thinking that those involved as staff learned a good deal, some through making mistakes, about how to run programs of this kind. There were no serious casualties, minimal illness, generally good logistical coordination, and few program snafus given the complex nature of the course design and the inexperience of staff. In fact, it seems remarkable to me that everything went as well as it did. I think this is largely a result of all the time, energy, and organization that went into planning the course by the Course Director and his predecessor. Without this and the willingness to ask anyone anywhere, as well as using the services of a consultant, to help with information and guidance, there would have been many more unanticipated problems. There were a number of points of crisis on the course, mostly having to do with coordinating roundevous places and times and the inability of the Course Director and the Consultant to be everywhere they wanted to be and do all of their jobs effectively. There were expectations of students, instructors, and the Director that were not fulfilled, and I do not think that this is unexpected nor exceptional in the circumstances. Much of this might have been anticipated and prepared for with more orientation time before the course began. On the other hand, no amount of preparation will totally alleviate problems and one of the functions of the Course Director is to help instructors process these problems and crises and still continue to be effective. This is a lonely position and a course director needs supports of his own to function effectively in such a situation. In this regard, given the complexity and difficulties of such a course, two co-directors with shared responsibility and a cooperative way of functioning together would be very beneficial. Even more essential, however, is some continuity among directors and key staff so that the lessons learned one year are not forgotten during the next and the program has the benefit of someone with tried and tested experience.

Recommendations. These are mostly subjective and based on comparison with professionally run programs such as Outward Bound. They are meant as a stimulus and put forth as an ideal rather than a prerequisite. Obviously, programs have been run on much less and other combinations are possible. But all that I mention are factors that need to be taken into account.

General:

1. A permanent course director be identified among the faculty on at least a half time paid basis (or an outside specialist hired) and other faculty be identified and compensated for assisting in the planning and organization of the course.
2. The program be encouraged to run without the assistance of a fulltime consultant but that outside resource persons, program specialists, and trainers be used for specific purposes such as planning, training, evaluation, and insuring the safety of high risk activities until permanent staff are sufficiently skilled and experienced.

3. Student leaders be paid some sum for their participation in the program and be given other benefits, such as scholarships or training opportunities, which will enhance their skills and reward their commitment to the program.

4. Faculty leaders take primary and continuing responsibility for the overall management and development of the course but work in cooperation with student leaders and share leadership in a carefully agreed upon and monitor manner.

5. The overall complexity of the course be reduced and course design reconsidered so that there are fewer logistical and program concerns as a result of not knowing what is going on and so that coordination of human and program resources becomes easier.

6. A program site and base be developed, as with the sailing, that is consistent, known, and carefully programmed to provide specific experiences that can be easily and safely replicated by inexperienced staff but which also provides some room for flexibility and group initiative.

7. Equipment be purchased to cover all the needs of such programs so that the program is not dependent on outside sources nor having to scrape at the last moment for the means to put a course in the field. These capital expenditures will pay off in the long run.

8. Some form of consistent outside evaluation and source of program information and support be maintained through organizations such as Outward Bound so that the overall perspective on the purposes and content of the course does not become inbred nor complicated with unrelated issues. In other words, develop a model that works and stay with it!

Specific Recommendations.

1. There be two course directors free to move about between groups and responsible for coordinating movement, logistics, and monitoring the process of the course.

2. A faculty supervisor be assigned to each set of patrols but free to move between them to support student instructors and provide additional and specialized resources.

3. Two persons be assigned to handle logistics and paid a stipend to do this thankless and demanding task.
4. More than two vehicles be available for the movement of students, staff, and resupplies.

5. A logistics and staff base (motel, cabin, lodge, etc.) be rented and provisioned for the duration of the course.

6. An extended and carefully planned reconnaissance of any new area be carried out well in advance of designing a course plan and all contingencies and potential risks be anticipated.

7. That local resource persons and professionally trained program persons be used to examine the program potential and dangers of the area and appropriate provisions made for either covering or limiting risks and planning for potential evacuations and other emergencies.

8. All staff have a physical introduction to the program area prior to the start of the course.

9. A detailed orientation and training program be designed and carried out for staff immediately prior to the start of the course.

10. An outside consultant or trainer as well as various resource persons be utilized to provide this training, be brought in as resource persons where the program demands or justifies it, and that someone from the outside be brought in to evaluate the success of the program and aid in the student and staff debriefing process.

11. A professionally trained and experienced program specialist be utilized to provide coverage for all high risk activities.

12. A syllabus and schedule for the training and orientation be established well in advance and a commitment obtained from all staff to participate. No staff should be used in any primary role who does not take part in this orientation and training.

13. Each patrol have one trained instructor.

14. A stipend or gratuity be provided for student leaders.

15. All equipment be purchased, strictly accounted for, damage charged to students, and maintained at the conclusion of the course.

16. The orientation for the course take place either on site or at some location separate from the pressures of being on campus.

17. Students be asked to arrive at the program site on their own totally prepared to go on the experience.
18. There be more high risk activities on the course and that these be more localized and more carefully coordinated so as to make better use of skilled personal.

19. Careful documentation be kept by all leaders and submitted to the course director at the conclusion of the experience.

20. Student evaluation be obtained in writing and summarized both at the end of the course and after six months.